

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, leadership times reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business for 30 minutes, with the first half of the time under the control of the majority leader or his designee and the second half of the time under the control of the minority leader or his designee.

The Senator from Wyoming is recognized.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I wish to comment on the issue before us today. I am glad we are dealing with this question. It is certainly one that has had a great deal of discussion and impact all over the country as to how we handle it. I think it is one of our principal issues. Certainly, there is a different view as to how it ought to be handled and all these kinds of things; nevertheless, I believe it is important that we begin to do something. Even though there are many other things that legitimately could be considered, of course, sealing the border is probably the first step that ought to be done.

The Senate, of course, passed a bill that was quite lengthy—including ways and means of dealing with those who are already here illegally—and created a good deal of discussion and debate. I didn't support the Senate bill in that I thought it was too broad in terms of dealing with people who had come here illegally, even though I do believe there are some, depending on the situation, who should be given an opportunity to go through the system. But I am pleased that we are beginning to do something.

The first thing, obviously, is to do something about the border. I am going to support the bill before us, although I don't think it is perfect. I think, frankly, there needs to be some limit on building fences. I cannot imagine building a fence, a 40-foot-tall fence, all across the border. All we would have is 40-foot ladders if we did that. But there are areas in particular where this needs to be done. I think this is an authorization where some decisions can be made with respect to how that is done.

There ought to be other things we consider along with it. One of them is that we need to have a modernized system for people coming to the United States. All of us want workers and immigrants to be able to come legally. That system needs to be modernized, made more efficient, so that those kinds of things can happen without taking a very long time. We are challenged with the notion of having some kind of identification system where we

can tell easily and clearly who are legitimate citizens and who are not.

In connection with that, I believe it is appropriate for employers to be required to report as to who on their work staff is legal and who isn't. As I said, this is a difficult issue and one we need to work on.

I simply want to say I am pleased we are moving forward to do something. I intend to support this movement today for cloture. I hope we can do that so we can start to do something about this issue, which is one of the most important issues to all of us.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Missouri is recognized.

COUP IN THAILAND

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I have come to the Senate floor many times to talk about our great interest in the nations of Southeast Asia and to call for increased engagement and more attention to the relations between the United States and Southeast Asia.

In the early winter of 2006, I spoke about the tsunami and the impact that had on the region. Many of us, particularly from farm country, remember what happened when Thailand's currency collapsed in 1997. It brought a tremendous decline in the region and a decline in our exports. We were previously exporting \$12 billion of agricultural product—much from the Midwest—to that region, and that drop of \$12 billion caused the precipitous drops in the prices of commodities sold by many farmers in the grain States. So we know that it is an important trading partner.

But yesterday, a military coup took over the Government in Thailand while its Prime Minister, Thaksin Chinnawat, was in New York at the U.N. Prime Minister Thaksin had been a successful businessman. He had strong support from Thailand's largely rural population but with opposition to the urban dwellers. In 2005, his Thai Rak Thai—which means “Thais love Thais”—I cannot understand why we didn't think of something clever like that as a name for a political party—captured 374 out of 500 seats in the House of Representatives. The opposition party boycotted it, however. There was discussion of potential corruption by the sale by the Prime Minister of his telecommunications and satellite business. He had controversies with the military, beginning when 87 Muslim protesters in southern Thailand died in security custody, and the Prime Minister was attempting to put his own people in charge of the military.

After the election, the King stepped in and asked the court to review the election. They set it aside, and Thaksin essentially resumed power as Prime Minister even though the election was overturned.

Now, it is with great concern and disappointment that we see the military

coup. Our neighbors in the region have spoken out. They have expressed concern, great disappointment. And it is clear that for the cause of the country and the region, the constitutional process must be restored in Thailand and an election date set for a new democratic government very shortly.

America has had in Thailand one of its best allies. We conduct numerous joint military exercises. Thailand was responsible for the capture of the infamous radical Islamic terrorist Hambali, who masterminded the Bali bombing. We have worked closely with them.

Thailand has been the economic stronghold of Southeast Asia. It is also a constitutional monarchy, with well-developed infrastructure and a free-enterprise economy and proinvestment policies. I think the economy will recover. As far as democracy, King Bhumibol, a benign monarch who served for 60 years, exercised his considerable influence to keep Thailand moving in that direction. Thailand, which, during the late 20th century, experienced numerous coups and military coups, had not had one since 1991. I believe King Bhumibol will push for a democracy and will get back on the negotiations between Thailand and the United States for a free-trade agreement.

As I said, Thailand is key in the region. I have described that region as the second front in the war on terror because al-Qaida-related radical Islamist groups have been conducting terrorist attacks here. It is set forth in a book by Ken Conboy, describing the most dangerous terror network. There is concern that since the bombings in southern Thailand have shown that there are insurgents—some 1,700 people have died—that this might become a haven, a breeding ground for the radical Islamists, rather than the insurgents in the three southern provinces of far south Thailand.

My view is that is an overreaction. I think the insurgents have issues with the Government, but to this point, I don't see evidence that they will become a host for al-Qaida or other related groups. They generally have practiced the moderate Muslim viewpoint of Islam of the Southeast Asia region.

Also, at the same time, I might mention, as we are speaking about the battle against terrorism and modern Islam, I visited Malaysia in August. Malaysia, again, has been a country that has been making great progress. It is a democratic nation committed to progress and development and has aspired to the peaceful and tolerant teachings of Islam. It is a key economic partner. It is our 10th largest trading partner overall. It has been growing at 5 percent annually. We are in negotiations for a free-trade agreement with them. Malaysia imports more from the United States than any